

KENNEDY'S DRIVE SINKS HITCHIN

By MICHAEL KNOX Wycombe Wanderers 1, Hitchin T. 0

WYCOMBE Wanderers forced no less than 14 corners in the second half of Saturday's match against Hitchin Town at Loakes Park. But somehow they were unable to add to Howard Kennedy's 45th minute goal and had to settle for a 1-0 victory.

The scoreline gives no indication of the superiority Wycombe enjoyed in a one-sided encounter. An overall corner tally of 17-4 paints a far fairer picture. One man who will testify to Wanderers' supremacy is their goalkeeper John Maskell, who must have become frozen through inactivity on a bitterly cold afternoon.

Wanderers, nevertheless picked up three points to keep them in with a very remote chance of retaining the Rothmans Isthmian League Division One championship. But if they are to pull off this miracle they must improve their finishing.

With a little bit of luck the Blues could have scored half a dozen times against a shaky and defensive minded Hitchin side. But a combination of indecisive shooting and an awkward bouncing ball in a strong wind, kept the fans sitting on the edge of their seats.

One player exempt from criticism is young striker Bruce Macrae, who once again was the best Wycombe forward. This was the first time I had seen him, but I was particularly impressed with his clever shielding of the ball. He was thus able to give himself more time to lay off intelligent passes to his colleagues.

Manager Brian Lee, made two changes from the side that defeated Oxford City in mid-week, bringing in Maskell and Dylan Evans for Paul Spittle and Geoff Anthony. Evans remains an enigma, producing moments of high skill one minute and then stumbling over the ball the next.

He had a rare old tussle with the Hitchin left back Kevin Hammond. Evans got round him twice early on, but Hammond kept him in check for most of the game and honours ended about even.

Hitchin's trouble was that they could never get going in mid-field where Terry Reardon was the dominant figure. Poor Tony Brothers, who played for the Blues two years ago, was unable to make any headway.

For the visitors, Maurice Howkins and Tony Martin shone in a hard-pressed defence while Steve Hodge and Neil Bunker looked dangerous on quick breaks. But they lacked the support to turn these breaks into prolonged periods of pressure.

With these deficiencies in mind, Hitchin chose to play with the wind at their backs in the first half and were immediately pressed back into their own penalty area, due to Wycombe's slick passing game.

The first sign of a chink in the Hitchin armour came after 13 minutes when Keith Mead, up for a corner, was allowed time to shoot at goal. He struck it well but goalkeeper Tim Saward blocked the shot and after a desperate scramble the ball was eventually cleared.

fraction too high for Evans, who headed wide. Then Evans flicked Birdseye's cross on to Horseman, who sent a firm header inches over the bar from 15 yards.

With all this pressure Wycombe became a little careless and were susceptible to a quick break. Paul Giggle gave them a warning by firing into the side netting while Dave Archibald shot wildly with only the keeper to beat after Maskell had cleverly narrowed the angle.

Just when it looked as though Wycombe's first half dominance would go unrewarded, they took the lead right on half-time. Macrae crossed from the left and Kennedy, finding himself in a surprising amount of room, had time to take aim before hitting a firm shot inside Saward's left hand post from the edge of the penalty area.

With the wind in their favour Wanderers bombarded the Hitchin defence to such an extent at the start of the second half that they forced six corners in as many minutes. Many of them came as a result of some sparkling play by Holifield who after an anonymous first half sparked into life.

The speedy mid-field player forced two good saves from Saward, the latter going for a corner. Holifield curled in the kick and Evans held his head in despair after a firm shot had been kicked off the line by full-back Hughie Pratt. From another corner Macrae once again turned neatly before shooting just over with his dangerous left boot.

Macrae was at the heart of several Wycombe attacks with astute passes and it was he who laid on a chance for Evans in the 57th minute. But the tall striker fired just inches wide of a post.

Corner followed corner as the second half progressed but still

Wanderers could not find a path through the solid wall of defenders. Evans did his best by firing a fierce shot straight at Howkins on the line. The defender came out distinctly worse for wear, having taken the full force of the effort on his stomach.

Dave Alexander came on for Macrae in the second minute of injury time — can any substitution have ever been left so late? — but Hitchin never remotely looked like saving the game and must have left the field wondering how they didn't concede five or six goals.

Wycombe were just as bemused. The forward line must click soon and when it does, one team is really going to suffer. It could be Barking next week.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, D. Bullock, K. Mead, J. Delaney, T. Reardon, D. Evans, H. Kennedy, B. Macrae (sub: D. Alexander 92nd min.), M. Holifield, A. Horseman.

HITCHIN: T. Saward; H. Pratt, K. Hammond, M. Howkins, T. Martin, A. Brothers, P. Thrustle, D. Archibald, S. Hodge, N. Bunker, P. Giggle. Sub: D. Webb (not used).

Referee: A. S. Barnes (Palmer Green).

Scorers: Wycombe — Kennedy (45 mins.).

ROTHMANS ISTMHIAN LEAGUE

	Division 1					
	P	W	D	L	F	A Pts
Ilford	31	17	6	8	41	28 57
Dagenham	28	17	5	6	64	37 56
Dulwich	35	17	5	13	54	32 56
Wycombe	31	16	8	7	48	32 56
Enfield	26	16	6	4	52	20 54
Hendon	31	16	9	7	41	23 54
Slough	34	14	10	10	50	38 52
Sutton	30	14	9	7	56	38 51
Tooting	27	14	7	6	49	28 49
Staines	31	14	7	10	35	27 49
L'therh'd	30	13	7	10	52	43 46
Barking	31	13	6	12	45	46 45
Hitchin	34	12	8	14	38	43 44
King's Lynn	33	13	5	15	48	72 44
Hayes	34	9	16	9	37	36 43
Walth' stow	33	11	9	13	40	47 42
Woking	35	11	8	16	49	52 41
Stort' d	30	9	8	13	32	36 35
Oxford	32	8	8	16	26	47 32
Southall	32	7	6	19	40	55 27
Ley'nst'n'e	33	5	10	18	25	52 25
Clapton	37	2	1	34	13	105 7

But this was nothing compared to the remarkable goalmouth action on the half-hour, when within 30 seconds Wanderers had three clear cut chances to take the lead. It all started with a cheeky back-heel by Macrae which split open the Hitchin defence. Tony Horseman, Macrae and Mick Holifield were all thwarted by the bounce of the ball and desperate defence.

Wanderers kept up the pressure. Macrae turned well and broke down the left, but his cross to the far post was just a